DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 444 797 RC 022 588

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TITLE	Valuing the Future: Education for Spiritual Development.
PUB DATE	1999-07-00
NOTE	9p.; In: Experiencing the Difference: The Role of Experiential Learning in Youth Development. Conference Report: the Brathay Youth Conference (Ambleside, England, July 5-6, 1999); see RC 022 586.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Experiential Learning; Foreign Countries; *Futures (of Society); Meditation; Outdoor Education; *Role of Education; Self Concept; *Spirituality; *Values
IDENTIFIERS	*Reflection Process; Spiritual Development; United Kingdom; United Nations

ABSTRACT

The Brahma Kumaris (BK) Spiritual University, headquartered in London, works toward helping others understand the role of spirituality in daily life and in creating a better world. In the early 1990s, a BK research project in 128 countries found that people's ideal vision of the future emphasized a return of the importance of values. In response, BK published a guide book that offered a universal approach to 12 spiritual values. BK was given general consultative status with the Economic Social Council of the United Nations and has been working with a UN agency to develop activities that promote incorporation of values in school curricula and to establish a program encouraging the spiritual development of young women. Another dimension of BK's work involves the practice of reflection and self-evaluation. Very much a part of experiential learning, the reflection process promotes a form of active learning that transforms and opens the door for spiritual awakening and consciousness. Outdoor experiences, in particular, awaken feelings of the sacred and allow young people to become aware of spirituality in their own lives. Spirituality begins with an enquiry into the unique workings of one's own self. Life skills related to communication and interaction with others are developed through knowing the self and learning to move thoughts and feelings in a positive direction. With positive spiritual development comes emotional stability and enhancement of mental abilities. Education must return to the position of enabling each individual's spiritual potential to be released. (SV)

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VALUING THE FUTURE – EDUCATION FOR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Sister Jayanti, Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

Firstly, just a word of great appreciation for the courage of the Brathay team, for all of the things that have happened so far here. I have been finding that on the one side I resonate so much with what has been said already, and on the other side I am aware that that's the sort of trend that's taking place in the world. In that we are seeing a world not just changing, but a world in which perhaps a paradigm shift has already taken place. And so we've moved away from a paradigm of materialism that I think we can see doesn't actually work anymore. We're now wondering what is the next phase, what does the future have in store? Again, in a way, you'd say that that's true of any generation, of any age: there's a question mark about the future. But just to put things into context, some time ago - I think maybe it was in the late 1970s - I'd read a report that was called Global 2000, and this was prepared by a person called Doctor Gerald Barney and he had taken up a huge research project in which he was looking at the conditions of the world at that time and projecting into the year 2000. I've had an ongoing conversation with him at different times, and he is now the president of the Millennium Institute in the USA. He told me a little while ago that all the dire prophesies that he had made in his report - based on scientific evidence and research, population, resources, pollution, all of these external factors, in a sense - all of these things had been confirmed beyond his expectations even as we approach the year 2000. But there had been more ingredients that he hadn't taken notice of. For example, when he was looking at the scene he hadn't expected things like climatic changes to be happening and now that's become a major factor within the chessboard. I'm saying this to point out what Valerie told us this morning as a staging post. I would say it's a time of transition, a very major time of upheaval and questioning about where it is we're wanting our world to go, and what it is we see happening in the 21st Century.

When we ran a project asking people how they saw the future - this was at the end of the 1980's and at the beginning of the 1990's - our research project extended into 128 countries at that time. We had people come back to us saying that it was interesting that they didn't ask for a world of bigger cars, better buildings or anything like this. Not even technology, they didn't even ask for that. They were asking for a world of values. They wanted to see values come back into the world. That, of course, led us into a further development of that idea, looking at values in terms of education, looking at values in terms of the different professions of the world, and many different arenas. So it is a very special time in history.

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I found this morning fascinating and I think the Geese Company must have ripped off a few masks. For myself also, that's the area I'm most interested in. What is it that's happening below the surface? And definitely in the path of spirituality, it's the exploration of our own inner world, and what's going on in terms of our thoughts, our feelings, our conscious mind, our unconscious mind, and being able to bring about positive transformation on all of those different levels. I felt it was a great way to make us look at both ourselves, as well as the things that we are involved with, and also look at what's happening in the world. I work on a principle that things begin in here and whatever is happening in here gets reflected in my world around me - my immediate world - but also gets reflected in the world out there. And so Mr. Fool creating chaos, I think, is absolutely right. If I look at the state of chaos out there, I don't have to ask the question why or how, but I know it's because there's chaos in here. Who can put right this chaos in here? It has to be my responsibility, no-one else out there can help me sort out this chaos. I have to take responsibility. I can be empowered, I can be encouraged, I can take inspiration. But at the end of the day, whatever tools it is that I am given, I have to work with those tools and work things out.

So, that is a very broad framework of where it is that the Brahma Kumaris Spiritual University stands. Just a couple of lines of further information about us. We started when the founder of the university had a vision, a vision of a better world, and a vision that inspired him to dedicate his life to helping others understand the role of spirituality in this spiritual dimension, and how that influences life. I have been involved with this since the 1960's. But it was in the 1990's that I began to get confirmation that I wasn't just a part of a very, very tiny minority who thought in this way. There's actually a very powerful, growing, quite vocal minority that thinks like this also. Two things gave confirmation to this.

Through the 1990's I've been seeing more and more an interest in the things of the spirit. Books related to spiritual development, self development. That's the fastest growing area of books in terms of non-fiction, both in the USA as well as in Europe. Meditation has come into the lives of not just *'young hippies'* but on all levels of society meditation is being acknowledged as something very useful. But it's interesting when the political scene takes on board something like spiritual values. In 1995, when there was the social development summit in Denmark, for the first time governments actually had within their statement, within their documents, that the cause of injustice, and the lack of equality was a factor of lack of spiritual values. It was through these, that there could again be hope for the future, and that the 21st Century had to be a century based on spirituality. Otherwise, what sort of civilisation could there be? Again, that's giving you a little bit of background about the things that I'd like to share specifically.

Spirituality and its connection with religion, I'd just like to make a statement about that. Firstly, because it's not always clear or understood and sometimes, in Britain at least, when you use the word *spiritual*, people have this vision of things floating in the air. I

don't know how many of you thought of that. But spiritual actually means an appreciation of personal values. And there is a clear connection to my relationship with the world. How I value my life, value others, and through that create a life in which I can be valuable to the community, and to the world. Through that also being able to value my own future.

I was very happy that the vision that the people who represented 'the young people', in particular, gave such a hopeful vision of the enthusiasm, and the motivation of young people today. So often I see a picture which is a little bit different. Generally a state of feeling of despair about the world but also a sense of demotivation about young people about the future, "What's the point of it?" "What's going on?" "What's going to happen?" So it was wonderful having people who shared a very positive sight. Because my own sense is that whatever is the vision I have, that vision is what I will realise, I will make into a reality within my own world, and the world around me. If my vision is that of hope, then that is the future we will create together. So, definitely, the vision I have is that at this transition point, at a time when really the doors open up, there's a huge opportunity that presents itself in terms of the information we have, the technology we have. Now the question is, what more do we need to create a future in which truly there is a better world for all of us. Not just for one part or segment of society. I think that it describes it very well if I say that the one thing that perhaps need changing absolutely is, instead of having cold hearts and hot heads, maybe we could change that around and have warm hearts and cool heads. Just simply a shift in that and it's going to be able to create something better for tomorrow for all of us together.

There's a number of different things that the Brahma Kumaris have engaged in, in terms of moving towards that better world. I mentioned that one of the ideas that had come up from our international project had been a world that was based on spiritual values again. Taking up that theme, what we did was to actually prepare a book that was called 'Living Values – A Guide Book' We found that this had a terrific response across the world. This took up the theme of a dozen values, and within that looking at the universal approach to those values. A little while ago we were given what was called 'general consultative status' with ECSOC, the Economic Social Council of the UN. I mention that to point out that the subject of spirituality is now being looked at in many different directions. The reason for our consultative status with the UN is because they felt that we had a specific speciality, that of our spiritual perspective and approach that was very much needed and valued at the UN. They challenged us when we wanted to dedicate this book, in terms of the 50th anniversary of the UN, that surely every religion, every tradition, had its own different values. We said, well within our organisation we work on a spiritual level and we find that people of all religions and all traditions come to us. People who are looking at the heart of faith and awareness. You come back then to the spiritual perspective, the spiritual approach, the thing that unites people; their hopes, their dreams, their aspirations. Across the world these are the same, they are universal truly. But also our fears, our weaknesses, our anxieties. They also are the same.

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Another comment again that touched me very deeply when somebody mentioned it, was how the colour of our skin may be different, but the colour of our sweat, our blood, our tears is the same. And so there is a universal connection that binds us together as one human family, and the values that we all share, in fact, are actually the same. And when we discussed it with people of other cultures, we found that it was true. When we gave a statement about all these values we found that they were acceptable to people of all traditions and so that made the United Nations again step back a bit and think. One particular section or agency, UNICEF, came back to us saying, can we do something with this? What we're looking for is a way to be able to help children inculcate this, do something with this. We've been working for a few years about this, but haven't been able to make headway. We got together a team of global educators in New York from about 20 countries. Within two days they had been able to come up with ideas for activities that could aid values development within curricula, within schools. I won't go into more detail about that because there is actually a workshop that Peter Williams will be conducting in the next couple of days, on that topic of Living Values and the educational programme, and giving you a flavour and taste of those activities. But connected with that is the fact that there's going to be an education forum in Barcelona at the end of July. UNICEF also mentioned something else that was interesting. They said that if you teach a boy, you teach one boy. If you teach one girl, you educate a family. That's certainly true in the part of the world that I come from, and maybe it's true in other parts of the world. So we decided that again, at their invitation, we would have a programme specifically for young women, called 'Young Women of Wisdom,' in which we encouraged young women in their teens to take up concepts and ideas and work together and encourage their peers and work with those ideas of spirituality, and the application of spirituality in life.

Perhaps you are tired of hearing this phrase 'when I was young' but I'll use it nonetheless because the world was actually quite different and the young people I meet today, I see the challenges they face are far, far greater than anything I had to cope with. One little example of this. I wonder, what would I have done if there had been peer pressure on me to take drugs. Today, I don't know. I can honestly take off the mask and say, "Would I have said no? Would I have had the courage? Would I have had the wisdom? Would I have had the strength? I have no idea." It wasn't a problem for me, it wasn't a question posed to me: would I or not? Today, maybe it's one of the lesser things that young people are having to deal with. When I was dealing with young women, in coming together with the particular ideas for this group, they were sharing the things they had to be concerned with and are challenged by. They found that through a development of self-esteem there could be greater power, greater strength, with which to cope with all these things the world now thrusts upon them. My heart went out to Suzanne this morning. I would suggest that the course that Suzanne needs to go on is one of self-esteem of a spiritual nature. I know that for myself, facing the discrimination of race and gender in my teens. I think I would have perhaps grown up to become an angry person, maybe

even a bitter person. But spirituality came into my life at a time when these things were just surfacing and through spiritual understanding and spiritual consciousness, I was able to deal with them in a very real way, and transform those energies so that I could come back to a state of appreciation of my own inner dignity and strength and move forward in life on the basis of that without being dependant or co-dependant. This is one of the ways in which spirituality is applied.

Another thing that we found is that between the 1980's and 1990's a shift that happened was demonstrated by a programme that we held some months ago called the reflective practitioner. That whole concept of reflective practice where, for example in the 1960's and 1970's, people thought that professionals were the experts and professionals could solve all the problems of the world. Well, by the 1980's it was very clear that the problems were multiplying, that the problems of the world were definitely not being solved by professional expertise. There had to be another dimension that came into it. This approach started at the end of the 1980's and today I see it working in many different ways, on many different levels. That practice in which you are not just engaged in your work but the practice of reflecting on your work; consciously taking a time to pause, a time to evaluate, a time to look back. And so this whole practice of reflection, of pausing, being able to look and contemplate and not just count the blades of grass in the contemplation, but actually to evaluate and learn and through that transform and learn and move forward. That again has been a whole area that has opened the door for spiritual understanding and consciousness. We see that very much as part of the process of experiential learning. The part in which it's not just information that's given and fed in but the process of education. That which is within being allowed to emerge and come through in my life and activity. So that sense in which I'm given that opportunity to look within, it's very much a part of that process in which one is learning to use one's mind in a constructive, creative, active process. Which is what the path of meditation is about. We have a programme coming up in the next little while which is going to be dealing with the theme of living values, young people, citizenship in communities in the 21st century. What was interesting for me in that was that there was a broad range of partners who came forward to say that this was something they were interested in doing. In particular, people working with the outdoors and aware that, in terms of their work outdoors, something very special happens to all people but especially young people. That is the awakening of the feeling of that which is sacred. Today when everything's on a materialistic level and we are assaulted by all the things around us in terms of just our senses and sensations, we forget that life is very precious, we forget that life is sacred, and not just human life, but all forms of life.

So the outdoors opens up the way for a young person in particular to get in touch with that which is sacred within, and be able to be aware of the presence of the divine in their own life. So we found that with organisations such as this, many different organisations, again they were very interested in the spiritual perspective, the spiritual development of young people in particular. This is why I am appreciating the courage of this particular

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organisation for the inclusion of spirituality in a very visible form within your conference here.

I'd also like to mention research conducted by the industrial society in their 2020 Vision Programme which reports on interesting views held by young people on major aspects of life and their future. Some of these things were touched upon in the presentations this morning but it's interesting that the comments we heard are also being reinforced by the research that's being undertaken. For example, many young people feel that there's a difference between learning, actual active learning, and being taught. Some feel that you are taught a lot at school but are not actually learning much at all. Young people often feel that formal education focuses too much on gaining academic qualifications rather than on equipping them with skills and knowledge for 'real life.' Within that, again demonstrated this morning, social and communications skills are rated as most important. Having the confidence to deal with different types of people, getting on well with people and being able to express yourself clearly, are all considered important skills for life.

It is the role of spiritual development within education that facilitates the development of communication skills and an appreciation of personal values. There is a clear connection between valuing the future, valuing my own future, valuing myself and valuing my own inner resources. All too often in a materialistic perception of the world, the spiritual dimension, and thus the inner resources of the self, are forgotten or under-estimated. The spiritual dimension includes knowing and valuing the self and developing relationships based on respect and trust.

One of the things that people are concerned about in terms of the immediate future is January 1st 2000. Meeting experts in terms of computer technology I hear two different sides of the same story. One side that tells me that January 1st 2000 will be fine, there'll be minor hiccups, but there won't be too many problems. Another side of the spectrum tells me that I don't really know what's going to happen and there's quite a picture of horror that's placed in front of us. Which ever way it is that I look at it, what would be the answer in terms of real life situations of dealing with that story? Even the picture of horror tells us there is one thing we have to focus on in terms of being able to prepare and move through that whole area of trauma and they use this word 'social cohesion'. I have a question about that, how does one create social cohesion? For me the answer comes in two words – respect and trust. I ask myself the question, how can I develop respect and trust? For me the answer is when I can value myself and respect myself, I can extend the same courtesy to my neighbour, to my family, to my friends. The chaos that Mr Fool has managed to create has been the destroying of respect for the self and, through that, respect around us. Respect on all levels has disappeared. To bring that back in again I have to begin here. Trust. Not a word we use very often nowadays. Somehow again that's disappeared. Again the starting point surely is learning to trust myself and then I can trust you, and then I can also win your trust. If you are talking about social cohesion and the movement towards a whole model of co-operation, which is surely what the

future has to be, conflict is not an answer for civilisation, really it isn't. There's no civility in conflict. Competition - I cannot agree - competition is not the way for the future but rather co-operation. So social cohesion can only come about when there is that respect and trust, with which we learn to be able to co-operate together. And so the future depends upon these factors and I see that it's the spiritual dimension that can help us explore and understand and develop all of these things in our life.

The starting of spirituality begins with an enquiry into the unique workings of the self – a desire to know what is happening in my own inner world. As I reflect on the nature of myself, I begin to see the power of my own mind and my own thoughts. The human mind has explored outer space and experimented with and harnessed external energies. Spiritual development is the education through which we experiment with, explore, understand and harness the energies of inner space.

One begins to see how wide and varied the quality of our thoughts can be. They range from pure, powerful and positive, to mundane or weak and even downright negative. Our thoughts in turn create feelings and these determine the quality of our communication and relationships. Life skills related to communication and interaction with others are developed through knowing the self and learning to move thoughts and feelings in a positive direction. We are the creator of whatever is happening within our own inner world.

With positive spiritual development comes emotional stability and enhancement of mental abilities, such as concentration and the ability to discern and decide. Lack of concentration is often cited as a failing of the modern world. Not just because we've lost our spiritual power, but there's actually another powerful piece of research into this which indicates that the pollution of the water, the air, the atmosphere, the food. And everything contains, all organisms human or otherwise contain approximately 500 extra chemicals that we've absorbed. This is information from the World Wildlife Fund. These chemicals are influencing all the systems of the body and the brain, in particular the lack of concentration power, the lack of tolerance power, influence on memory. Looking at the mind and learning to focus its energy is part of the process of self-reflection. A mind that is undisciplined is unable to have clarity and so the capacity to discern clearly is hampered. Learning to 'filter' away wasteful and negative thoughts creates peace in which a situation can be perceived with a greater understanding of reality and meaningful decisions taken.

Clearing away the accumulation of the dust of negativity allows me to see the innate goodness of the self. As I see my own natural qualities by removing the layers of dust, value for the self returns. Through the process of healing my own emotions, my communication, interaction and relationships also change and relationships are also healed.

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Our hope for our future lies in spirituality and values; in fact how else can there be a future? Education must return to the position of enabling the potential of each individual to be released and then we can move forward towards a better world.

What I would like us to do is have a few minutes of reflection time together in which I will ask you to just sit comfortably, find a position in which the body can sit still. You'll probably find that is when the body is in balance and the back upright; if you're holding things in your hands just put them down for a while. You don't need to stand on your head to meditate, you don't need to do any other postures or exercises, because reflection, meditation is very much to do with the mind. Letting the body be relaxed so that the mind can be free. I'll speak out my own thoughts and invite you to follow those ideas. As my body becomes calm and quiet I feel my physical energy moving into a state of harmony I take the time to look inside my own inner world, looking at my mind. Many thoughts moving in many directions but even as I watch my thoughts they seem to slow down. I pick up on one of these thoughts, the thought of peace. I keep the though of peace and hold it. As this thought stays with me I begin to feel peace filtering through all the different layers within my awareness. I become peaceful and I can feel peace radiating through my body, healing, restoring, energising. I can feel rays of peace extending out, out into the atmosphere around me, out into the world, and peace begins to feel natural. I become aware that in fact peace is my natural state of being. This is who I am. In this awareness of peace I begin to value myself. I begin to trust myself. I keep this sense of peace and become aware of the present moment and the situation here but I stay connected with this feeling of peace

This was a simple demonstration of that coming back to the innate quality of peace, but you can do the same with all the other values, all the other qualities that I believe are the essential components of the human spirit, because that truly is the state of all human souls. Goodness.